



Lenin the writer

## One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

With Lenin's books, the titles are often so exceptional that they pass into the language without people knowing what the book was about. Sometimes this leads to people "quoting" such a title in aid of a cause which is at odds with the actual book that Lenin wrote. Such is often the case with "What is to be Done?", words that opportunists, utilitarians and "economists" love to use to prop up their actually anti-Leninist arguments. You have to read the book to know that.

["One Step Forward, Two Steps Back"](#) (1904) is another unforgettable title of Lenin's that people are often happy to

repeat, as a form of words, without any knowledge or understanding of Lenin's work of that name or of its place in history.

"One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" is a unique work, different from all others. It is a classic. It is Lenin's report of the 1903 Second Congress of the RSDLP, which had given rise to the terms "Bolshevik" and "Menshevik" and all that went with the famous split in the ranks of the RSDLP.

Roughly, the step forward was the winning of a majority in the Congress, while the two steps back were first the loss of *Iskra*, and then the loss of the Central Committee, following the lobbying of the Mensheviks after the Congress. The Mensheviks got themselves co-opted where they had not been elected, and proceeded to undermine and ruthlessly expel the good Bolsheviks who had been elected.

As unique as it was, historically speaking, yet the split between the "opportunist" Mensheviks and the revolutionary Bolsheviks does have universal resonance, and applicability as a lesson. It was not the first such split. Marx and Engels had experienced a few similar contradictions, such as the one that gave rise to Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Programme". Lenin himself makes a comparison with the split in the Great French Revolution between the "Montagne" and the "Gironde". Later, there was the great 1914 split in the Social-Democratic Parties at the time of the Imperialist First World War. There have been many more splits, since then, including the post-Polokwane formation of COPE in South Africa.

The Communist University has put some parts of this book together, and placed a later (1907) reflection of Lenin's, from the Preface to Lenin's collection "[Twelve Years](#)", in front of them. This composite document is attached and linked below. Clearly, the division between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks had not gone away by 1907, and we know that it did not go away until it was resolved another ten years later in the October, 1917 revolution.

A little time spent with this shortened version of Lenin's book will help to gauge the nature of Rosa Luxemburg's response to it, which will be given next, together with Lenin's rebuttal of Rosa.

Lenin's final reply, also given in the next item, settled this particular matter as between these two great revolutionaries, although it was not the last of their disagreements.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, Compilation, Lenin, 1904](#).
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